Lateral

Journal of the Cultural Studies Association

Review of *Fighting Feelings: Lessons in Gendered Racism and Queer Life* by Gulzar R. Charania (University of British Columbia Press)

by Hannah Renda | Book Reviews, Issue 14.1 (Spring 2025)

ABSTRACT In *Fighting Feelings: Lessons in Gendered Racism and Queer Life*, Gulzar R. Charania explores the gendered racialization of women of color through a plethora of interviews with her participants, paying specific attention to the intersection of identities that these women hold such as gender, race, sexuality, age, and socio-economic status. Charania centers the thoughts and experiences of racialized Black and women of color feminists to provide her readers with critical tools to navigate the lived experiences of racialized women while also acknowledging the violence of dominant narratives entrenched in white supremacy. By attending to the practices of scholars and theorists as well as the lives of her participants, Charania urges readers to reconsider the convergence of gender and sexuality in racialized hierarchies.

KEYWORDS psychology, race, sexuality, women's studies

Fighting Feelings: Lessons in Gendered Racism and Queer Life. By Gulzar R. Charania. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2023, 290pp. (hardcover) ISBN 978-0-7748-6899-0. US List: $99.00.

> *"Can I write honestly? Not only about how much I've been hurt but how I have hurt others?"*
> –Cathy Park Hong

In *Fighting Feelings: Lessons in Gendered Racism and Queer Life*, Gulzar R. Charania engages theory with the lived experiences of her participants—Canadian

women of color whose specificities are revealed throughout the book, but whose demographic information is purposefully sparse—in an attempt to resist racialized singularity and to attend to the intersectional realities of women of color. At the forefront of her book, Charania seeks to reconfigure who is telling stories of racialization and *how* they are telling these stories—effectively decentering a white audience and bringing voice to the racialized women who have so often been left on the margins. For Charania, centering the thoughts and experiences of racialized Black and women of color feminists provides us with critical tools to navigate the lived experiences of racialized women while acknowledging the violence of dominant narratives entrenched in white supremacy. An interlocking analysis of power, provided by Charania and her participants, renders a space that emphasizes the obvious articulations of racial dominance, as well as articulations that are more unassuming. Shaped by the intersections of Black and women of color feminist thought, Black studies, and queer theories, Charania makes an effort to "understand and respond to the despair and privatization of racial harm in the lives of women of colour" (8). *Fighting Feelings* explores the universal yet unique experiences of racialized women in Canada that express gendered racialization within the world writ large.

Charania delineates the three anchors in the introduction that she seeks to uphold throughout her book: "Complicity and Complexity," "Emotions," and "Quiet." "Complicity and Complexity" accounts for the tension that is present within the lives of racialized subjects, attending to "racialized women's divergent strategies for survival . . . while also accounting for the constrained racial conditions in which people come to take up these practices" (17). "Emotions" centralizes the significance of emotions for both racialized girls and women, and for the women of color who reproduce the racialized violence they experience. The emotional burden of living as racialized girls and women comes with hurt but also provides a pathway to knowledge and resistance (19). In other words, "sometimes they [fight] feelings, and other times they [use] feelings to fight" (20). Finally, "Quiet" invites us to listen to the insights that the quiet can offer. The participants in the

book equip Charania with the power of the quiet within their interviews. Both Charania and her participants ask us to "think not only about Black and racialized subjects who are publicly resistant but also about what can be learned and observed through and with the quiet" (22). These three anchors guide us through *Fighting Feelings* in a way that allows reconsideration of the convergence of gender and sexuality in racialized hierarchies.

Fighting Feelings is divided into five body chapters. Chapter one, "Riding People, Reading Life: Methodological Commitments," foregrounds the methodological guidance within the succeeding chapters of the book. Prefacing the chapters to come, "Riding People" reconsiders academia's role in the lack of commitments to the prioritization of the lives of racialized people—specifically racialized girls and women. This chapter asks us to defy categorization that disallows us from grappling with the damage of racial domination and its consequences. In effect, Charania preserves collective memory through the interviews and begins to rethink racialized subjectivity.

Chapter two, "Fragments, Feelings, Sometimes Words: From Memories to Racial Literacies," accounts for the formative experiences of racial violence within racialized women's adolescent experiences. This chapter is the first to include interviews with the participants. Charania makes the conscious decision not to provide background information about her participants as a means of avoiding exploitation of the participants' pain, or over-analysis of their backgrounds. This decision also leaves space for readers to draw connections to broader experiences of racial violence, while holding space for individual experiences throughout the book. Chapter two is divided into seven parts that speak to the range of feelings participants had during their first experience with racial violence. Within this chapter, Charania works through the elusiveness of racism, what it means to have explicit racial instruction, the effect of the privatization of feelings, the circulation of memory, and the unsolicited burden of racial hierarchies. Altogether, Charania demonstrates that "understanding racism is a form of

political knowledge" (56) and that love, in and of itself, is a form of political knowledge and expression as well (58).

The third chapter, "Lessons in Gendered Racism: Enduring Memories of School," explores the experiences of racialized girls and women in their encounter with peers, teachers, and school administration. Charania examines three large themes in this chapter. First, turning to critical race theorists, she addresses the challenges of a "post-racial" world that mystifies racial violence. Second, Charania focuses on "how people live with, decipher, and respond to the racial conditions of their lives" (85). Lastly, the chapter acknowledges that while measurements of academic success matter, they do not tell the complete story of schooling, especially in the context of a racialized society. Accounting for several of her participants' experiences with the school system, chapter three calls for the experiences of racialized girls to be more centered in educational studies.

Chapter four, "Quiet Queers: Gender, Sexuality, and Racial Formation," works at the intersection of race and sexuality to provide a more expansive understanding of racial formation. Charania delves into the calibration of risk involved in the lives of racialized women, specifically racialized queer women. Charania considers the stories of three participants in order to "illuminate the reasons why queer racialized girls can so easily go missing, particularly in high schools" (147). While the majority of the book focuses on the adverse experiences of girls and women of color in relation to white supremacy and racial domination, this chapter harkens "interdisciplinary conversations, commitments, and crossings between critical race, feminist, and queer scholars in education" to elucidate the complex lives of queer women of color (173).

The final chapter, "Canada: The Cost of Admission," describes the tensions between racialized women's lived experiences and Canada as a nation-state and agent of colonial violence in these women's narratives. Charania offers insights into racial literacy in Canada, amplifies her participants' accounts of their

encounters with Canada as a site of colonialism, and acknowledges the complexities of living within a nation-state that erases the experiences that are brought to life within *Fighting Feelings*. This chapter works to emphasize "the national constraints and conditions that defer, displace, or outlaw an analysis of racial and settler colonial logics as practices and realities in contemporary Canada" (224). Though speaking on behalf of her own country, by recognizing the national constraints and conditions of Canada, Charania reveals the same obstructions are found within nations throughout the world.

Charania concludes her book just as she started, with an anecdote that urges her readers to rethink the ordinary, to question our position within the world, and to really listen in the quiet. Drawing on the critical interventions of critical race, feminist, and queer scholars, the conclusion acknowledges the feat of remembering. Remembering is sometimes the most hurtful thing to participate in; however, Charania and her participants remember in order to protect and guide the racialized girls and women living within and outside of Canada. Charania tells us that the "tension between what we know, feel, and experience, on the one hand, and white authority to define the what, where, and how of racism, on the other hand, is at the heart of this book" (229). *Fighting Feelings* stands out for its inclusion of voices that have often been lost in the noise of this tension, and for its attention to the details that offer readers a comprehensive understanding of the complexities of living in a racialized society. *Fighting Feelings* is relevant to those interested in education studies, race and ethnic studies, and gender and sexuality studies, asking readers to consider how the intersection of identities reflects the multiplicity of life that racialized girls and women experience throughout girlhood, schooling, and adulthood.

Author Information

Hannah Renda

Hannah Renda is a master's student in the Gender and Race Studies department at the University of Alabama. She intends to pursue a PhD in English Language and Literature following her graduation in May 2025. Their research interests are grounded primarily in queer history and theory, race and ethnicity, and how these identities are interpreted through creative nonfiction and memoir as both literary and activist activity.

View all of Hannah Renda's articles.

Article details

Hannah Renda, "Review of *Fighting Feelings: Lessons in Gendered Racism and Queer Life* by Gulzar R. Charania (University of British Columbia Press)," *Lateral* 14.1 (2025).

https://doi.org/10.25158/L14.1.16

This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License. Copyright is retained by authors.

Lateral is the peer-reviewed, open access journal of the Cultural Studies Association.

ISSN 2469-4053